

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 10385

BRUSSELS FOR USDEL SEC

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: IS, EG, XF
SUBJ: HAARETZ MILITARY ANALYST ON CAIRO CONFERENCE PREPARATIONS

1. IN CONVERSATION DECEMBER 6 WITH EMBOFF AND VISITING
ECONOFFICER JOHN CRAIG FROM EMBASSY CAIRO, ZEEV SCHIFF,
MILITARY ANALYST FOR HAARETZ, DISCUSSED ISRAELI THINKING ON
THE CAIRO CONFERENCE. SCHIFF WILL BE ACCOMPANYING ISRAELI
DELEGATION TO CAIRO AND CANDIDLY ADMITTED THAT HE OWES HIS
SELECTION TO HIS LONG TIME FRIENDSHIP WITH DELEGATION HEAD
ELIYAHU BEN-ELISSAR. SCHIFF IS OVERLY MODEST. HE IS REGARDED AS
FOREMOST IN HIS FIELD AMONG ISRAELI JOURNALISTS AND IN ADDIT-
ION TO BEN-ELISSAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRIVY TO EXCELLENT
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SOURCES.

2. SCHIFF BEGAN BY RELATING SOME ISRAELI IMPRESSIONS OF
SADAT GAINED DURING HIS VISIT TO JERUSALEM. ISRAELI
PSYCHOLOGISTS DID A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF SADAT FROM THEIR
DIRECT OBSERVATIONS. SOME POINTS SCHIFF LEARNED FROM THIS
STUDY: SADAT IS SINCERELY RELIGIOUS; HIS RELIGIOUS DEVOTION

IS NO POLITICAL GIMMICK BUT RATHER A BASIC ELEMENT OF HIS PERSONALITY. HE IS A BIT SLOW BUT APPARENTLY REACHES HIS OWN DECISIONS AND IS COMPLETELY SURE OF HIMSELF. ISRAELIS NOTED THAT HIS PARTY INCLUDED AIDES BUT NO REAL ADVISERS. SCHIFF SAID THAT DAYAN WAS STRUCK AT BUTROS-GHALI'S RELATIVE IGNORANCE OF THE SUBTLETIES IN THE ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT, WHICH WAS ATTRIBUTED TO HIS NEWNESS IN HIS POSITION. LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE COULD BE DISCUSSED WITH MEMBERS OF SADAT'S PARTY WITHOUT A REFERRAL TO THE PRESIDENT.

3. TURNING TO THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, SCHIFF MAINTAINED THAT THE GOI DOES NOT REALLY WANT JORDAN TO ATTEND -- AT LEAST NOT INITIALLY. ISRAEL IS DELIGHTED AT THE PROSPECT OF DIRECT TALKS ALONE WITH ITS SINGLE STRONGEST ADVERSARY. IT IS PREPARED TO DISCUSS WITH EGYPT OTHER THAN STRICTLY BILATERAL ISSUES, BUT HOPEFULLY IN ONLY A GENERAL WAY. BY THE TIME JORDAN JOINS THE TALKS, IF IT SO DECIDES, THE GOI HOPES TO HAVE ACHIEVED SOME NEGOTIATING SUCCESS WITH EGYPT.

4. SCHIFF NOTED THAT THE COMPOSITION OF THE ISRAELI DELEGATION IS NOW FIXED AND WILL NOT BE EXPANDED. HE STOUTLY DEFENDED THE CHOICE OF BEN-ELISSAR TO HEAD THE DELEGATION. EGYPTIAN DISAPPOINTMENT WITH HIS SELECTION IS MISPLACED. HE IS DIRECTLY WIRED INTO BEGIN THE WAY NO FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL (OTHER THAN DAYAN) COULD BE. HE SPECIFICALLY NOTED THAT MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL EVRON WOULD HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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BEN-ELISSAR IS LESS A SPOKESMAN FOR BEGIN THAN IS BEN-ELISSAR. THE NAMING OF BEN-ELISSAR MEANS THAT DAYAN'S CONTROL OF THE SITUATION MAY BE WEAKENED. HE IS NOT BELIEVED TO HAVE ANY DIRECT INFLUENCE ON BEN-ELISSAR. ON THE OTHER HAND A DIRECT CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION HAS BEEN OPENED UP BETWEEN BEN-ELISSAR AND WEIZMAN WHICH SCHIFF BELIEVES WILL ENDURE DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS. IN THE PAST FEW DAYS BEN-ELISSAR HAS MET WITH WEIZMAN SEVERAL TIMES, BUT THERE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN LITTLE CORRESPONDING CONTACT WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

5. SCHIFF SAYS THAT BEN-ELISSAR, WHO HAS HAD NO DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATING EXPERIENCE, IS CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO HANDLE THE TALKS AND TO SUCCEED. FOR ITS PART, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (UNNAMED OFFICIALS) IS SANGUINE THAT BEN-ELISSAR WILL COME RUNNING BACK FROM CAIRO IN FOUR DAYS PLEADING TO BE BAILED OUT OF AN IMPASSE. (COMMENT: THE FOREIGN MINISTRY MAY ALSO BE UNRUFFLED BY ITS APPARENT UNINVOLVEMENT BECAUSE IT EXPECTS THE CAIRO CONFERENCE TO BE A DIVERSIONARY SIDESHOW FOR MORE SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS ELSEWHERE. SEE SPETEL.)

6. ASKED WHAT BEN-ELISSAR WOULD BE EMPOWERED TO DISCUSS, SCHIFF ANSWERED THAT HE WOULD HOLD TO THE LINE OF NO PALESTINIAN

STATE; NO PLO REPRESENTATION AT THE CONFERENCE; AND NO RETURN TO THE 1967 LINES. HE SAID THAT BEN-ELISSAR COULD DISCUSS TERRITORIES BUT NOT BORDERS. DAYAN HAS SET THESE LIMITS. BEN ELISSAR WOULD BE ABLE TO DISCUSS WITHDRAWAL (BUT APPARENTLY NOT TO WHAT PRECISE LINE) AND SOLUTIONS TO THE PALESTINE PROBLEM.

7. LOOKING AHEAD, SCHIFF WAS CONCERNED THAT EGYPTIAN EXPECTATIONS ON THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PEACE WERE TOO HIGH AND HE PREDICTED EGYPT WOULD BECOME A "FINANCIAL VIET NAM" FOR THE U.S. IF PEACE BREAKS OUT. HE INDICATED LINGERING SUSPICION OVER SADAT'S MOTIVES AND EXPRESSED APPREHENSION OVER EGYPT'S WAR OPTION IF NEGOTIATIONS FAIL. HE ONLY HINTED AT INFORMATION HE HAD THAT EGYPT'S WAR PREPARATIONS
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CONTINUE BUT HE DID NOT SHARE THIS INTELLIGENCE.

8. COMMENT: A SEASONED, BALANCED, DISCREET AND REFLECTIVE JOURNALIST, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE SCHIFF HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY SADAT'S INITIATIVES BUT DOES NOT QUITE SHARE THE PUBLIC'S EUPHORIA. DESPITE HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH BEN-ELISSAR, WHICH GOES BACK TO THEIR DAYS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND HIS RESERVATIONS ABOUT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, SCHIFF IS A DECIDED MODERATE AMONG ISRAELIS AND HAS LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE LIKUD'S HARDLINE. HE IS ALSO A GOOD FRIEND AND VALUABLE CONTACT FOR THE EMBASSY. HE HAS ASKED IF HE COULD TALK WITH SOMEONE AT EMBASSY CAIRO WHEN HE IS COVERING THE CONFERENCE AND CRAIG ASSURED HIM HE WOULD BE MOST WELCOME.
LEWIS

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